

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

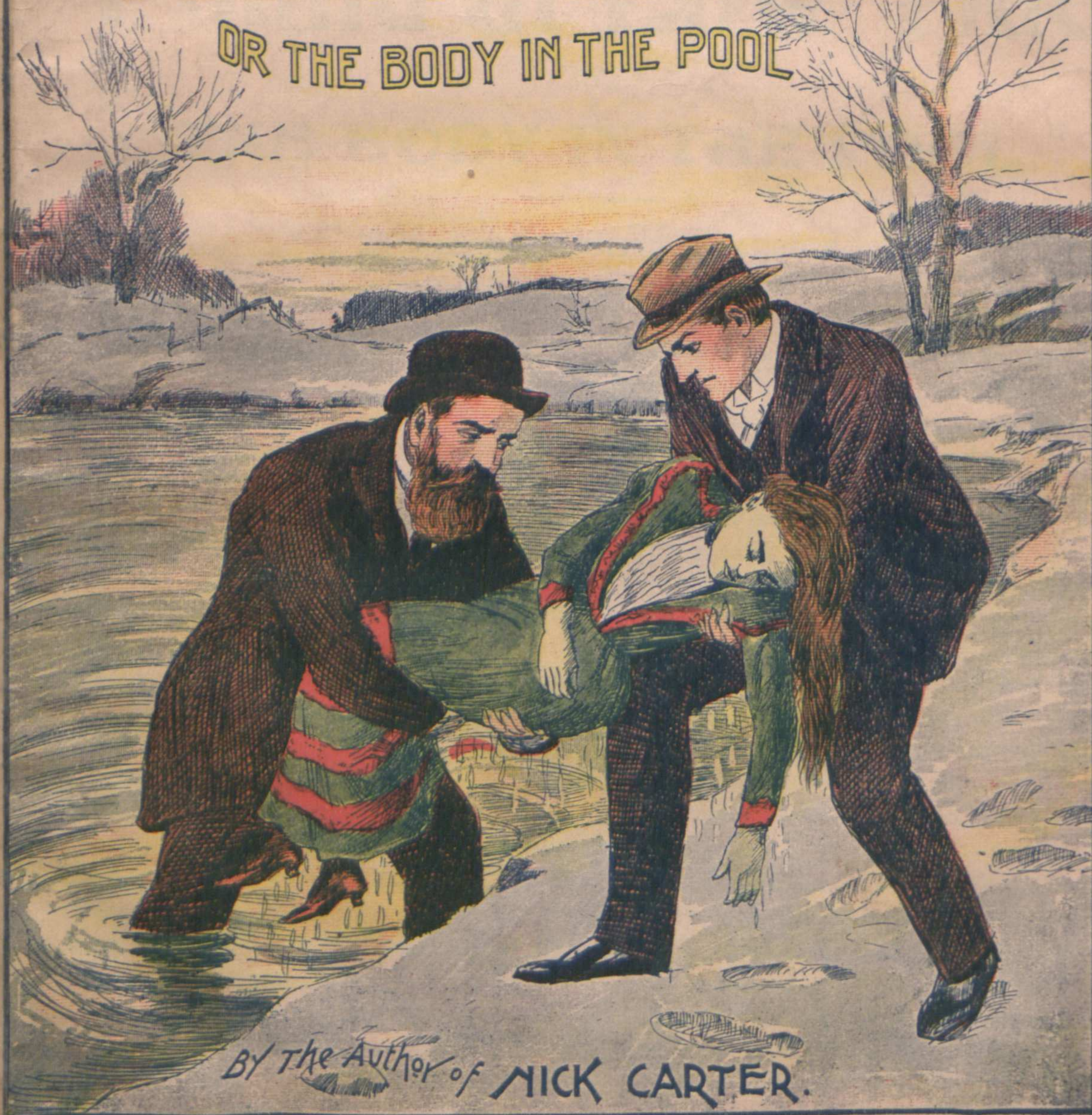
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FOUND AT LOW TIDE

OR THE BODY IN THE POOL



TOGETHER NICK AND THE EX-CHIEF HAD LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN GETTING THE BODY TO THE SHORE.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Found at Low Tide

OR,

THE BODY IN THE POOL

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT.

The occupant of a room in Miller's hotel on the outskirts of Mount Vernon New York, was awakened from a sound sleep one February night of the present year by a shrill, piercing shriek.

It was uttered by a woman, and it was instinct with mortal terror.

He sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and listened intently for a repetition of the cry.

None came.

The average man would have wondered awhile, then the warmth and coziness of the bed, and the selfish disinclination to rise, would probably have induced him to woo the drowsy god again, and allow the explanation of the cry to be deferred until morning.

But the man whose slumbers had been disturbed did not belong to the common herd of humanity.

He was curious to know what had happened, and he did not let his physical comfort stand in the way of the investigation which he intended to make.

Arising quickly, he dressed himself and went down stairs.

It was after midnight.

No one was stirring in the building, and there were no lights or sounds of voices to indicate that the cry had been heard by any other inmate of the hotel than himself.

There had been a slight fall of snow during the evening, but the moon was now shining clear and bright, and the sky was cloudless.

Standing on the porch, the lodger saw foot-prints in the snow, which upon close investigation proved to have been made by some person coming from the road.

The prints were peculiarly shaped, and were undoubtedly made by a woman.

"She must have intended to come upon the porch, and either knock at the door

or enter," muttered the investigator, "for the tracks show that she paused when within a few feet of the steps, moved about in a circle, irresolutely, I should say, and then started off around the building."

Following the foot-prints, the seeker for information went a considerable distance before he found a spot where they terminated.

This spot was the swimming pool in East Chester Creek.

The lodger at Miller's hotel looked down into the water, but the black depths refused to reveal the dread secret they held.

A walk up and down the creek showed that no other tracks had come to the pool, but the ones made by the woman.

"A case of suicide, probably," said the man to himself; "but I will have to wait until morning before I can pursue my investigations with any hope of success."

He returned to the hotel, but not to sleep, for all night long that cry of terror haunted his ears.

At daybreak he was up and on his way to the creek.

When he arrived at the swimming pool he found a large, portly man with an honest, intelligent face, who was endeavoring to drag something out of it.

It was low tide, and the lodger at Miller's hotel, as he came nearer, saw to his horror that the body of a woman was floating upon the surface of the shallow water. The portly individual, who was up to his knees in the mud, saw the newcomer, and at once called out:

"I have made a ghastly find here. Woman drowned, and it is hard work to get the body out, for it is weighted down with stones."

"Let me assist you."

Together the two men had little difficulty in getting the body of the dead woman to the shore.

A rope several feet in length had been

attached to her waist, and at the end two large stones weighing together about twenty-five pounds had been secured.

The victim of a cruel fate was young, not more than eighteen years of age, and with strikingly handsome features.

She was of slim build, below the medium height, and did not weigh more than ninety pounds.

Long, glossy black hair hung loosely about her shoulders, and long silken lashes of the same hue shaded eyes that in life must have been large, luminous, and bewitching.

She was attired in a brown dress of fine material, fine laced shoes, black stockings, and expensive underclothing. She wore neither hat nor cloak.

Coroner Downs was notified of the discovery, and the body was removed to the morgue to await identification.

The portly man, who found the body, was James Waters, ex-chief of the Mount Vernon Fire Department.

He remained in the morgue while the coroner was making an examination of the clothing and person of the corpse.

"No marks of violence on her person," he said.

The lodger at Miller's, who was also present, suggested that an autopsy might reveal something.

"True," returned the coroner, "for she might have taken poison before consigning herself to the water."

"Or been given poison, if it is a case of murder and not of suicide," rejoined the lodger.

"Yes."

"By the way," said the coroner. "I wish one of you gentlemen would run down to Invermere, (that's the name of the place where the hotel is located,) and see if Mr. Carter has come."

"Nick Carter, the great detective?" queried ex-Chief Waters.

"Yes."

"What! Are you expecting him?"

"I am, but not in reference to this case. I wired him yesterday afternoon that I would like to see him to-day on important business."

"And if he has come you think you may induce him to make some investigations for you in this affair? Is that your idea?"

"It is. The matter I telegraphed him about has been settled, and if he has nothing else on hand just now, I would like to have him take charge of this case for me. From indications it promises to be as mysterious and sensational as the Jennie Cramer business of a few years ago."

"You know Carter, then, of course?"

"I do not, strange as it may seem, but Superintendent Byrnes advised me to secure his services, if I could, whenever I had any important or perplexing case on hand."

"All right, Downs. If he's at the hotel I'll fetch him up here."

Waters had got to the door, when the lodger at Miller's said, quietly:

"It won't be necessary for you to go to Invermere."

"No? And why not?" asked the ex-chief, in surprise.

"Because I am Nick Carter."

CHAPTER II.

SEARCHING FOR CLEWS.

"I arrived so late last evening," said Nick to the coroner, "that I concluded not to call upon you until morning."

After a short conversation in relation to the business which had brought the great detective to Mount Vernon, the coroner said:

"At this early stage in the inquiry into the death of the young woman whose body was found in the creek, I cannot speak of a reward, nor make you any kind of an offer to take charge of the investigation, but——"

"Say no more," interrupted Nick, quickly, "for I wish to inform you that I will take the case, reward or no reward."

The coroner's face lighted up with pleasure.

"I am interested in the affair," the great detective continued, "because of my presence here at the very opening of the investigation, and also on account of the mystery in which it is wrapped."

He did not say anything about the cry he had heard in the night, and of his own movements immediately thereafter for reasons of his own.

Ex-Chief Waters departed shortly afterward, and the coroner resumed his examination of the corpse.

In the pocket of the beautiful victim's dress was found a small portemonnaie with thirty-five cents in change; also a note-head of the Marsh House, Tarrytown-on-the-Hudson.

It was dated a month previous, and had written on it the single word "dear," as though the person who had penned it had started to write a letter.

A business card of a New York firm was also found in the pocket, with these words written on the back: "No. 6—46, Saturday, March 22."

In the bosom of her dress the coroner discovered a part of an envelope.

It was addressed, "Miss Grace Fulton, care of G. Fulton, Merchant Tailor, No. 1787 Amsterdam avenue, New York City." The postmark was originally indistinct, and was rendered almost useless for the purpose of tracing the letter by the action of the water.

But the discovery which interested Nick Carter the most was an old rabbit's paw sewed to the lining of the dead girl's dress.

He gave a start when he saw it, for it recalled a peculiar incident to his mind.

The paw, according to the belief of many simple-minded people, is a charm

which is supposed to bring good luck to the wearer.

Two months before Nick had seen a rabbit's paw in the hands of a stylish young man on the cars between New York and White Plains.

Sitting behind the young man, who had as a companion a woman, closely veiled, the great detective heard him say these words:

"Now, Grace, as I have been at great pains to get this paw for you, I want you to promise me never to part with it as long as you live."

"I promise," came the answer, in a low, sweet voice.

"And on my part," he lovingly returned, "I will promise to be true to you till death."

"That is all I ask," she replied.

Nick heard no more, and went on reading his paper.

When the train arrived at White Plains the pair of lovers got off.

Nick saw the young man's face, and noted that it was dark and handsome, and wore signs of dissipation.

"Not the sort of fellow an honest man would trust his daughter with," was his thought.

Other matters soon engaged his attention, and the affair of the rabbit's paw had slipped from his mind, and was only recalled when the coroner of Westchester County took the same article, or one similar to it, from the dead body of the beautiful young girl.

"How long would you say that the body had been in the water?" asked Nick.

"About five or six hours."

"Then it was her cry I heard," said the detective to himself.

"It is a case of suicide, I think," remarked the coroner, as he walked out of the morgue with Nick.

"What makes you think so?"

"From a number of facts. First, there are no marks of violence on the body.

Secondly, the rope with the weights could easily have been attached by herself; and in the last place, because no other tracks led to the pool but hers, excepting, of course, the tracks you and Mr. Waters made."

"Might there not be tracks leading to the pool from the other side of the creek?"

"Perhaps. You will ascertain whether there are any or not, I suppose."

"I have already done so," said Nick, quietly.

"When?"

"While you and Mr. Waters were conveying the body to the Morgue, I waded through the mud and ooze of the pool to a clump of weeds growing in front of a long shed for horses owned by the hotel proprietor. In the mud about the weeds I found the foot-prints of several persons."

"That's news, indeed," ejaculated the coroner.

"The tracks led to the horses' shed.

"There I found a paper bag with fragments of cake in it."

"The girl must have sat down there to take her lunch," put in the coroner.

"Would she had done this, think you," queried Nick, "if she had intended in a few minutes to end her life?"

"No, she wouldn't."

"There are several summer horse cars stored in the shed," resumed Nick, "and near one of them were evidences of a struggle in the dirt.

"I did not pursue my search for clues any further then, for I looked out and saw that the wagon had started for the morgue, and as I was desirous of ascertaining as soon as possible what a search of the dead girl's person would disclose, I hurried on to catch up with you."

After obtaining a promise from the coroner that no mention to outsiders should be made of Nick's discoveries before the holding of the inquest, the great detective went back to the creek.

Near the horses' shed was a fallen tree.

There were tracks leading to it, and Nick, examining them closely, saw that they were large and totally unlike those made by the unfortunate girl.

The tree had been recently blown over, and the roots standing up in the air left a big hollow.

In this hollow Nick's eyes fell upon a bundle.

He drew it out, and found it to consist of a woman's cloak and hat.

The cloak had been roughly folded, and the hat had in it a white silk handkerchief.

"She never put the things there," was the great detective's quick comment. "The tracks are not hers in the first place, and no woman would rumple up a cloak in that way in the second place.

"But why were they hidden? Why didn't the murderer put them on the person of his victim and consign them to the water?"

The answer to these questions came when Nick pulled out of an inner pocket of the cloak a crumpled sheet of letter-paper.

It bore the Marsh House heading, like the piece of note-paper found in the pocket of the dead girl's dress, and it contained these words written in a trembling, feminine hand:

"I place these articles in the hollow by the fallen tree in order that they may be sent to my aunt, Mrs. Fulton, 455 Seventh avenue, New York, to whom they belong, I having borrowed them for a day. I do not wish to have any post-mortem examination of my body, for I hereby declare that I die of my own free will and by my own hand. My reasons for self-destruction are strong ones, and must forever remain a secret to the world, which has been so cruel to

"GRACE FULTON."

Nick Carter's face was a study when he finished reading this extraordinary production.

It expressed not surprise, but amusement and satisfaction combined.

"You're a very cunning fellow," he mused, "but you would have covered up your tracks the better if you had not written this letter.

"You must have been in an excited frame of mind when you indited it, for an intelligent person in his sober senses would have known that the letter would likely have an effect opposite to that intended; that instead of preventing an autopsy it would suggest one; that instead of establishing a case of suicide, it would point unerringly to murder.

"Yes," ran Nick's cogitations, "the murderer must have been in a state of alarm and fear when he wrote it. He had probably committed this foul crime, and the cry that the beautiful and helpless victim sent up as she was about to be plunged into the pool must have harrowed up his guilty soul to such a pitch that for some time afterward he was destitute of either coolness, shrewdness, or foresight."

Nick made no further discoveries about the place, and when he returned to Mount Vernon in the afternoon the inquest was in progress.

The testimony mystified the coroner.

It tended to show that the girl had committed suicide.

The body had been identified as that of Grace Fulton, who had lived with her father and step-mother at 1787 Amsterdam avenue, New York.

Her life here had not been a happy one, and two days before her death she left the house after a family quarrel, and went to the home of her aunt on Seventh avenue.

This lady testified that Grace declared that she was tired of the abuse to which she had been subjected by her step-mother and father, and would never return to them.

She complained also to the witness that she had been kept a prisoner, and every

time the door-bell rang she started up as if in fear that some one had come to take her home.

In conclusion, Mrs. Fulton deposed that Grace wept bitterly when she left, and said she did not know what would happen to her if she failed to obtain work.

J. King, a tailor of Mount Vernon, testified that the girl had applied for work at his shop on the day before the finding of her dead body in the creek. He could give her no encouragement, as she was too frail for a tailoress, but referred her to an employment agent, who, in turn, sent her to the wife of a real-estate agent who was in need of a nurse.

The latter lady found Grace too feeble to do the work about the house, and the girl returned to the house of King utterly disheartened.

She stayed there a few moments, and then went out into the streets, and no one could be found who had seen her alive after that.

This was between twelve and one o'clock in the afternoon.

At seven o'clock next morning her body was found floating in the shallow water of the creek, with the rope and the weights attached to it.

From the heart of Mount Vernon, where King lives, to Invermere, where the swimming pool is located, it is two miles, over a rough country road that is deserted during the cold season.

It was, therefore, not strange that she should have walked the distance without meeting any one.

The post-mortem examination told one thing to Nick Carter, another to the coroner and jury.

Traces of arsenic had been found in the stomach, but not sufficient to cause death.

Whether administered by herself, or through the murderous connivance of another, the fact was apparent that a mistake had arisen in regard to the quantity.

Nick thought to himself when the doctors rendered their report, "if she had swallowed more, she would not have been able to have uttered that piercing cry of terror that roused me from my sleep."

The coroner's thoughts were something like these: "There is nothing in the evidence to controvert the theory of suicide. The records show cases almost numberless of suicides who took double, triple, and sometimes quadruple measures to cut short their lives.

"As for the tracks of two persons being found on the farther side of the pool, there was nothing to show that they had not been made by other persons than the deceased, and some one who might have murdered her."

Nick saw how the testimony was running, and turned over the letter found in the cloak without any comment.

At his request the coroner confined the great detective's examination only to the matter of the discovery in the hollow by the fallen tree.

It was now Nick's wish that a verdict of suicide should be rendered, in order that he might the better pursue his search for the murderer.

For that pretty Grace Fulton had met her death at the hand of an assassin the great detective had no doubt.

The cloak and hat were identified as the property of Mrs. Alfred Fulton, the aunt, and the letter, examined carefully by that lady, was stated to be in Grace's handwriting.

Nick, by permission of the coroner, asked her a question or two.

"Have you ever seen many specimens of your niece's penmanship?"

"She wrote me one letter last year."

"And you form your opinion of the letter before you from what you remember of the handwriting in the letter that came to you a year ago, do you?"

"Yes."

"That's all."

And Nick walked out satisfied in his mind that Mrs. Fulton, while honest in her opinions, had not proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Grace Fulton wrote the letter.

After an adjournment of the inquest had been taken until the following day, Nick took the train to New York.

Before attending the inquest at Mount Vernon he had sent a telegram to Chick, directing that a certain investigation on Amsterdam avenue be immediately made.

Reaching his office, he found Chick awaiting him with an important announcement:

"You wanted to know if Grace Fulton had any suitors, or had lately been much in the company of a particular young man?"

"Yes. Well?"

"She has been keeping company for some time with a young man who lives out of New York."

"Did you learn his name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Alfred Dixon."

"His business?"

"He is a salesman in a silverware emporium on East Fourteenth street."

"And doesn't live in New York?"

"No. His home is at South Mount Vernon."

"Ah!"

"He was described to me as tall, muscular, and with a dark mustache."

Nick nodded his head understandingly.

This might mean the young man whom he had met on the train to White Plains two months before, who had presented the old rabbit's paw to the girl he addressed as Grace.

"Anything more, Chick?" asked the great detective, after a pause.

"Yes; Dixon is a married man."

"That's bad."

"Bad for her."

"Yes, and bad for his wife, if he turns out to be the man I saw in the cars."

And then Nick told Chick the story of the rabbit's paw.

CHAPTER III.

THE WRONG MAN SUSPECTED.

"Where did you obtain this information about Dixon?" asked Nick, after he had told Chick of his discoveries.

"At several places, but principally at the house of George Fulton, Grace's father."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"A small, mild-mannered fellow, honest and well-intentioned, and evidently ruled by his wife, who is taller and stronger."

"Well, what did he say?"

"This: That Dixon and his wife lived in the house with him at two periods. The families were friendly, and when the Dixons moved to South Mount Vernon Grace promised to stay a day or two with them in the near future."

"It is strange that Mrs. Dixon did not appear at the inquest," said Nick.

"Perhaps she was out of town and knew nothing about it."

"Perhaps."

"But you don't think it strange that Dixon himself failed to show up?"

"No; that is, upon the supposition that he is the murderer. But go on. What else did Fulton say?"

"He said that Grace liked Dixon's society, but he had never known her to go out walking with him."

"A neighbor named Ellis, however," continued Chick, "told me that he had seen the girl out Harlem way several times of an evening, and that she was always accompanied by a tall, powerfully built man with a black mustache."

"In Harlem I obtained more evidence to the same effect."

"The man she walked with may not

have been Dixon," said Nick, "though the presumption from the evidence now at hand is that he was the man."

The next day Nick was back at Mount Vernon.

Chick had been directed to look up Dixon, find out where he had been on the night of the murder, and also on the afternoon preceding it.

Just before the inquest was resumed, the coroner said to the great detective:

"I have changed my opinion since last night."

"You think it a case of murder, then?"

"Yes."

"You must have discovered some new evidence?"

"Yes. A teamster has told me a strange story. I will put him on the stand the first thing, so that you may hear it from his own lips."

The teamster, who proved to be a young man of prepossessing appearance, testified that on the morning of the day preceding the finding of the body, he met a short, slight girl, who looked like the deceased, on the road between East Chester and Mount Vernon.

He was hauling stone for the town dock at the time, and was, therefore, driving so slowly that he had a fine opportunity to watch the girl's movements.

She had passed his wagon when a hack drove up and stopped beside her.

The hackman was a short, stout man, with a smooth, red face, and little eyes set close together, and he had never seen him before, though he knew all the hackmen by sight or acquaintance in that part of the country.

"Well, what happened when the hack stopped?" asked the coroner, as the teamster paused.

"A young man got out of the hack and shook hands with the girl and kissed her."

"How did she take this familiarity?"

"She did not seem to like it, though she submitted to it."

"What sort of a man was he? Describe him."

"He was tall, well made, and had a dark complexion, and a black mustache."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"No."

"Proceed."

"He took the girl to one side of the road, and began talking to her in earnest tones. I could not hear all that was said, but I caught these words as I drove past the place where they stood: 'It must be to-night or never.'"

"Did she say anything in return?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear it?"

"Not all of it."

"Repeat what you did hear."

"'You have deceived me so often,' were the words that reached my ears."

"Did they begin or complete a sentence?"

"They completed it, for she shook her head sadly after speaking them, and started to move away from the dark-faced young man."

"How did he take her answer?"

"He seemed to be very angry, and he talked rapidly for some time. I was moving farther away from the pair all the time, and did not catch a syllable. The last I saw of them, he was getting into the hack, and she was moving away from it."

"Going toward Mount Vernon?"

"Yes."

It was already in evidence that a short time after this Grace Fulton had appeared at King's tailoring establishment and asked for work.

Other testimony went to show that the deceased was a good, obedient girl, who had never been known to do a wrong, and whose character in the locality where she lived was above reproach.

A second adjournment of the inquest was taken at Nick's request.

He was standing outside the morgue in a brown study, when Chick and a tall, handsome young man came up.

"Nick, let me make you acquainted with Alfred Dixon. Mr. Dixon, Mr. Carter."

The great detective gave the young man the benefit of a keen, searching scrutiny.

He was not the companion of the girl, Grace, in the White Plains car, the man who had presented her with the rabbit's paw.

"He's all right," said Chick. "Got a first-class alibi."

"I am glad to hear it."

All the same Nick's countenance was grave as he waited for the young man to make his explanation.

For the alibi, while it would establish Dixon's innocence, would also tend to make the affair of the murder more complicated than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RABBIT'S PAW RE-APPEARS.

Alfred Dixon rather nervously began:

"It's a shame that my name should be dragged into this terrible affair."

"If you are innocent of wrong, your name will not be tarnished," said Nick.

"I hope it won't, for my wife's sake. I left her in a very weak state to come here and present my vindication."

"To come to the point, I will say that I was at my place of business from morning until night on the day that Grace Fulton came to Mount Vernon. Your assistant, Mr. Carter, will corroborate me in this."

"Correct," said Chick.

"When my work at the store was over, took the cars for home, and arrived at

South Mount Vernon in time for supper. The doctor was there, and he remained in the house until after midnight at my request, as my wife's condition at the time was exceedingly critical."

"Did you leave the house during the time of the doctor's stay?" asked Nick.

"No."

"I have interviewed the doctor," said Chick, "and he will swear that Mr. Dixon was by his wife's bedside all the time."

Dixon paused a moment, and then said:

"If you want to ask me any questions, Mr. Carter, go ahead. I am willing to answer them."

Nick thought a moment, and then began:

"Did you ever go out walking with the deceased during the last six months of her life-time?"

"No."

The answer came unhesitatingly and frankly, and the great detective, looking into Dixon's honest face, believed that the young man spoke the truth.

"As a matter of fact," said Dixon, "I knew very little about Grace Fulton."

"Three months ago my wife and I lived above Fulton's tailor shop on Amsterdam avenue."

"I saw the girl frequently, as a matter of course, but I paid her no more attention than any of the other neighbors."

"When we moved to South Mount Vernon," continued Dixon, "my wife's health began to decline, and I deemed it advisable to procure a girl to assist her in the housework."

"At my suggestion she wrote to Grace Fulton—as I could think of no one else at the time—and asked her to come and work for us a few weeks."

"I don't think she ever received the letter, for we never heard from her after it was sent."

"About a month ago I went to Fulton's shop and in the presence of the father and step-mother, planned to meet her a

the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street station of the Harlem road, on the next afternoon.

"I gave her the card of the firm, which was afterward found in her pocket, with the indorsement '6—46, Saturday, March 22.' "

"What did the indorsement mean?" questioned Nick.

"The time for the departure of the train, simply.

"She did not keep this appointment," Dixon proceeded, "and when I went to see her afterward and asked her why she had not come to the train, she said she had forgotten the hour.

"Her further conversation at the time convinced me that she did not want to enter my service. Her manner was listless, and I could perceive that she had something on her mind that was troubling her greatly."

Dixon had nothing further to say, and the next day he was on the stand at the inquest and told the same story.

The verdict rendered was that Grace Fulton had come to her death at the hands of some person or persons unknown.

"Chick," said the Little Giant, when Dixon had gone, "we have got to find the young man with the black mustache who took those walks with Grace Fulton out Harlem way, and who also gave her the rabbit's paw. Suppose you try Harlem and vicinity, while I run up to Tarrytown."

"Very well."

"And while you are looking for the murderer, keep an eye out for a short, stout hackman with little eyes set close together."

"I will."

"As for me," Nick proceeded, "I shall try to find out who wrote the address on the envelope which was found in the dead girl's pocket."

The two detectives separated at the Mount Vernon railway station.

Chick went on to Harlem while Nick waited twenty minutes for the up train, and was a passenger for White Plains.

He was followed into the smoker by a smooth-faced young man, who wore smoked glasses, and whose dark hair had been shaved close to his head.

Taking a seat in the corner, he remained with his head bowed on his breast and in an apparent doze until the train stopped at White Plains.

Then he sprang up suddenly and turned his head in Nick's direction.

The great detective was then on his feet and moving toward the door.

On leaving the train he proceeded to a livery stable and engaged a rig to take him to Tarrytown.

He of the smoked glasses followed the disguised detective to within a short distance of the livery stable.

Waiting at a corner under a tall elm, he saw Nick drive off in a buggy along the Tarrytown road, and then he went quickly to the telegraph office and sent off this dispatch:

"William Brink, No. 18—— street, Tarrytown: L. G. on his way. Watch him. Will be over to-night. BOKE."

Nick went along at a slow pace, expecting that the man with the smoked glasses would hire a horse or a rig like his own and follow him.

But after going a few miles and seeing nothing of the fellow, the great detective concluded to make a change in his plans.

He stopped at a neat cottage in a hollow, the owner of which he knew by reputation, and left the horse and buggy there, with instructions to return the same to White Plains early the next morning.

Half an hour after this business had been concluded, a ragged and vicious-looking tramp was making his way from the hollow toward White Plains.

He encountered no one on the way.

Arrived at White Plains, he began a systematic round of the saloons.

At only one did he stop and call for a drink.

It was in the vicinity of the livery stable where Nick Carter had hired the horse and the buggy.

When the tramp entered, the barkeeper was engaged in earnest conversation with a young man who wore smoked glasses.

"Whiskey!" called out the tramp in a hoarse voice, as he came slouching up to the bar, "an' gimme ther best you've got in yer joint. See?"

The barkeeper, a pale-faced, slim-necked young man, scowled at the tramp, but did not make a move to fill the order.

"Yer t'ink I'm broke, dat's wat yer t'ink," continued the tramp, calmly, "but I ain't. I've got more boodle dan any mug here. Betcher cartwheel I have. See?"

"Show yer boodle and quit chinnin'," said the barkeeper.

The tramp produced an oil-skin purse, which he opened before the barkeeper and the young man with smoked glasses.

It contained a thick roll of bank-notes and some small article wrapped in a black silk handkerchief.

Holding up the latter, the tramp said, earnestly:

"I wouldn't take a hunnerd dollars fer it."

"What is it?" asked the now curious barkeeper.

"It's er mascot."

"What?"

"A mascot—der opposite to a hoodoo; see?"

"Yes, I see."

"Glad yer does. An' maybe der mug wid der smoked lamps is in a wuss fix an' can't see, eh?"

The party addressed quickly replied:

"Don't get too funny, cully, or I might ring the bell on you."

"I'll see yer later about dat, mister."

"I hope you will."

"Nothin' 'ud please me better."

"Say," put in the barkeeper, "cheese this side racket and come to business. Show us the mascot."

"Will yer treat if I do?"

"Yes."

"Better hear how I got it first, hadn't yer?"

"Just as you say."

"Den I says yes."

"All right, then; tell us how you got hold of it."

"I foun' it in der road."

"Along with the purse and the money?"

"Naw; 'thout anythin'."

"Silk handkerchief around it?"

"Correct and w'en I flashed dem peepers o' mine on de find I knowed I was fixed."

"Fixed? How?"

"Dat I'd collared de boss mascot in der world; dat it 'ud bring me good luck frum de word go; see?"

"I see."

"An' it did bring me good luck, fer t'warn't more'n an hour after w'en I put my clamhooks outer dis purse."

"Did you find that in the road, too?"

"Naw."

"Where did you find it, then?"

The young man with the smoked glasses asked the last question.

"Right in der town."

There was a pause, during which the tramp opened and closed his hand several times over the article hidden in the handkerchief.

"Come," said the barkeeper, sharply, "open that silk wipe and trot out the mascot."

"Dat's w'at I'll do."

The tramp opened the handkerchief on the counter and disclosed something to the view of the two spectators which

caused one of them—the young man with smoked glasses—to give a start of surprise.

The something was a rabbit's paw.

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER'S RUSE.

The tramp was Nick Carter, and he had obtained the rabbit's paw from the coroner at Mount Vernon.

He observed the start made by the man with smoked glasses with an inward thrill of satisfaction.

The man, to his mind, was in some way connected with the murder of pretty Grace Fulton.

He might even be the murderer himself.

"Let me see the mascot," said he of the glasses, with assumed composure.

Nick passed over the article.

The man took it up and placed it close against his glasses and looked at it long and carefully, turning it over many times during the operation.

His hand trembled when he put it down on the counter.

"Can it be possible that he recognizes it as the identical rabbit's paw that was given to the dead girl?" thought Nick. "And if he does, he must either be the murderer or very close to that mysterious individual."

The great detective had not counted on a recognition of the charm; for to him it looked like an ordinary rabbit's paw, and after a close inspection he could discover no private marks upon it.

If the man with the smoked glasses was the murderer, then he would naturally put down the person found in possession of the peculiar article given as a charm to the murdered girl, as an enemy—in all probability a detective.

Nick was on his guard when the man

spoke again, this time in a sneering manner.

"I suppose you expect to find another roll of bills before night comes."

"I don't expect to, but I won't be astonished if I do."

"Let me see those bills, if you please."

Nick tossed the purse to the man, who took out the roll, smoothed the bills carefully, and began to count them.

"Seven hundred and fifty dollars—a pretty good haul for a tramp."

"I'll be able ter booze fer a year on the find," said the disguised detective, as he smacked his lips.

The man with the smoked glasses replaced the notes in the purse, and then looked the pseudo tramp over from head to foot.

"You won't booze if you go to jail," he said, in a meaning tone.

"Then I won't go ter jail; see?"

Nick grinned as he said this, and nudged the barkeeper.

"This story of yours is too gauzy," continued the man with the smoked glasses.

"Maybe you t'ink I swiped der boodle," said Nick, with a quick assumption of anger.

"I know you did," was the cool response.

"Yer does, does yer?"

"Yes."

"Den perhaps yer know der name of der party wot owns der papers."

"I do."

"Wot's his name?"

"James Mitchell."

"I'd like to see James 'bout a pair of seconds."

"What for?"

"Ter ax him a question."

"What would you ask him?"

"If dis is his purse 'n money."

"There's nothing to prevent your asking the question now."

"Dat's good; dat's cunnin'. But who'll I ax it of?"

"Me."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"Den you mus' be James Mitchell."

"That is my name," replied the man with the smoked glasses, calmly, "and now you may ask your question with positive assurance that it will be answered."

Nick looked ugly when this speech was delivered.

"Is dat your purse?" he said, in a harsh voice.

"It is."

"An' your money?"

"My money."

"Yer a liar!"

As the disguised detective spoke, he made a grab for the purse.

But Mitchell was too quick for him.

Putting the purse in his pocket, he squared off and prepared to knock out the audacious tramp who had dared to give him the lie.

Nick Carter smiled grimly as he noted the other's war-like demonstration.

He intended to give Mr. Mitchell a little surprise.

The latter was built like a pugilist, and handled himself like one.

And now ensued a game of fisticuffs that made the one spectator—the barkeeper—open his mouth in wonder and admiration.

Mitchell led off with a right-hander which would have landed on Nick's jaw if Nick had not divined the move and dodged.

A terrific upper-cut sent Mitchell reeling against the wall.

Before he could recover himself Nick fetched him a powerful blow in the spot where he was accustomed to store his wind, and followed it up with another under the ear.

The man with the smoked glasses went down as if he had been struck by lightning.

While he lay upon the floor in a dazed condition, Nick quickly repossessed himself of the purse and bank-notes.

Thrusting them, with the rabbit's paw, into his pocket, he waved his hand at the barkeeper and went quickly out.

Mitchell recovered his senses in a few moments, and staggering up to the bar, called for whiskey.

When he had poured a stiff horn of the fiery liquid down his gullet, he said, with a look of fear:

"That fellow was a detective."

"Who is he after?"

"The man who put Grace Fulton to sleep."

The barkeeper turned pale.

"Better let Jack know at once how the land lays," said Mitchell, "or he may give himself dead away before he knows it."

"Jack's over in Harlem."

"Too near. He ought to be a thousand miles away. 'I'll go over to-night and see him.'"

"See who?"

These last words were uttered by a short, stout man with little eyes set close together, who stood in the door.

"Jack!" cried the barkeeper in surprise. "Just the man we were talking about."

"Yes?"

"Say, did you pass a tramp when you came up the street?" asked Mitchell.

"No."

"Then he is in hiding outside somewhere," remarked the barkeeper, nervously.

"Who's afraid of a tramp?" sneered Jack, who had a deep bass voice, and an aggressive manner.

"I am," returned Mitchell, with a pale face, "and you'd be afraid, too, Jack Sprat, if you knew what that tramp knows."

"Rats! He can't know what I know."

"What's that?"

The hackman looked cautiously about, as if afraid of being overheard and then said, in a hoarse whisper:

"It's something that happened in Harlem to-day. You afraid!"—with a contemptuous sniff. "Wait till you hear my gentle bazoo squeak, and then you'll have something to be afraid of."

Mitchell's face grew paler.

The barkeeper went to the door and looked out.

No one could be seen in the vicinity.

Coming back to where Jack Sprat and Mitchell stood, he waited in some anxiety for the former's revelation.

"I was in a beer joint this forenoon," began the hackman, "when a mug comes in that I knew at once as a detective."

Mitchell and the barkeeper exchanged glances.

The same thought had occurred to both.

The detective bore some relation to the tramp.

"I knew him—though he had togged himself out and monkeyed with his face to fool people—for he used to live at Hellion City, Nevada, where I was brought up; and he's got a trick of his eyes that I used to notice when he was on the pipe; see?"

Mitchell nodded his head.

"I can guess who the fellow is," said the latter. "It was Nick Carter's assistant."

"Chick!" gasped the barkeeper in alarm.

"You bet," returned the hackman, "the mug was Chick, sure enough."

"Then you're lost, Jack, that's all."

Jack shivered slightly.

"I am in a corner, and that's a fact."

"Did Chick see you?" asked Mitchell.

"Yes."

"Well, what happened?"

"I pretended not to see him."

"Where were you?"

"Behind a table reading a newspaper.

When he put his lamps on me, I held the paper before me so that I could watch his face without his seeing mine again unless he waltzed up close."

"Yes, yes; and what then?"

Mitchell's nervousness was so pronounced that he took off his smoked glasses, put them in a case, and placed the case in his pocket.

His eyes, dark and piercing, were without infirmity.

The glasses had been used for purposes of disguise.

At the moment he took them off a green-looking countryman passed the door, looking carelessly in as he did so.

Mitchell's eyes were on Jack, the hackman, and he did not see the countryman.

The latter stopped in front of a large empty box on one side of the door.

It rested on the ground with the open side underneath.

After a minute's consideration the countryman crawled under the box.

He had barely done so, before Gus, the barkeeper, came to the door for the second time.

At that moment a man was just turning the corner above the saloon, whose figure, in the distance, looked like that of the countryman.

Satisfied that the latter had gone by, Gus went indoors again.

"You needn't whisper any more," he said to Jack, "for there's no one about."

"Let's all stand by the door so we can see whoever passes," suggested Mitchell.

"Good idea," said Gus.

To the door they went, and the conversation continued, with the countryman under the box but a few feet away.

Jack now proceeded to answer Mitchell's last question.

"When Chick saw me put the paper in front of my face, he must have guessed that I was onto him, for he stayed in the place but a minute longer.

"When he went out I jumped up and made for the door."

"Back door?" queried Gus.

"No, front door. I wanted to see which way the detective went."

"Did you see?"

"That's what I did. He had just stepped off the stoop to the side of the saloon building when I bolted out past him."

"Without seeing him?"

"That's what. But I saw him when he spoke."

"What did he say?" asked Mitchell, in nervous impatience.

"'Hello, Jack,' says he, 'and how are you making it, now-a-days?'"

"'So-so,' says I, trying to be indifferent. 'Sometimes I've got a stake, but mostly I am broke. 'Haven't seen a splitter for a week,' I goes on, 'and not five minutes ago I had to shove up my shoulder for a beer.'"

"Chick smiled at this, and then suggested that we go inside again and hit the whiskey a lick or two for old times' sake.

"'I'm your huckleberry,' says I, promptly, and making a big brace to keep my courage up.

"After we'd thrown ourselves on the outside of some of the worst rotgut I ever tackled, Chick takes me to a corner of the saloon and sets me down, quiet, but firm-like.

"'Now, Jack,' says he, with a look in his eyes that made me think of jail, 'there's to be no funny business between you and me to-day, is there?'"

"'I don't know why there should be,' says I, with a bold face, but a quaking gizzard.

"'Because funny business won't pay.'"

"'What do you want?' I asks.

"'I want to know,' says he, as cool as a cucumber, 'the name of the party you took in a hack out to Mount Vernon and East Chester way three days ago.'"

"You could have knocked me galley-

west with a feather when he said these words."

"But you didn't give me away, did you?" interrogated Mitchell, hoarsely, and grasping the hackman fiercely by the arm.

Jack Sprat gave a grunt of disgust.

"What do you take me for?" he snorted. "To give you away would mean to give myself away, too."

"So it would," assented the other, in a tone of relief. "Go on."

"I says to him, innocent-like, 'Ain't you made a mistake?'"

"'No,' says he, 'nary a mistake.'"

"'Yes, you have,' says I, 'if you think I was out of New York three days ago.'"

"Then he looks at me hard and he bears down on his voice when he speaks again.

"'Jack,' says he, and I can hear the voice now, 'I remarked a few moments ago that we wouldn't have any funny business. You went out of town three days ago, and you went to Mount Vernon. Don't deny it, for I'll have to prove you're a liar, if you do.'"

"Maybe you think I ought to have tackled him then and there for calling me a liar, but if you'd been knocked out a couple o' times by the bloke, as I was at Hellion City, then you'd have been as meek as a lamb, as I was.

"'Iv'e got nothing to say,' I chips back, 'to a man that goes in to insult me.'"

"Chick grinned in my face at this.

"'Well,' says he, after a minute, 'if you won't talk, I'll have to take you along with me and let the inspector have a hack at you.'"

"'Steers?' says I.

"'Yes.'"

"Then I weakened," continued the hackman, as he shut one eye on Mitchell, "and I up and told him that I had been down to Mount Vernon that day, but that the party that hired me to make the trip

had given me a tenner not to give his snap away.

" 'What was his snap?' asks Chick, pointedly.

" 'To meet a young girl he'd made a mash on.'

" 'Aha!' says my man from Helion City, 'now we're coming to it, Jack. And did you meet the young girl?' he says.

" 'We did.'

" 'Near Mount Vernon?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Well, what then?'

" 'My fare talked to her awhile, then left her, and I drove him back to New York.'

" 'You are sure he went to New York that forenoon, are you?'

" 'Sure,' says I.

" 'Where did you drop him, Jack?'

" 'At his place of business.'

" 'And where's that?'

" 'In East Fourteenth street.'

" 'And now you may tell me his name,' says Chick, bland-like."

The hackman began to chuckle.

Mitchell looked at him, dubiously.

" 'Well?' demanded Gus, the bar-keeper, "and what name did you give him?'"

" 'The name of a mug that I saw the girl talking with at her home once or twice.'

" 'And who is he?'"

" 'Alfred Dixon.'

Mitchell slapped Jack Sprat on the shoulder in hearty appreciation of the lie he had told in his favor.

" 'How did Chick take the game you gave him?' queried Gus.

" 'He looked at me curious like for a moment, and then he says slowly:

" 'I'm much obliged to you, Jack, and I'll go right up to East Fourteenth street and have a talk with Mr. Dixon.'"

" 'Did he go?' asked Mitchell.

" 'Yes. That is, he waltzed off and left me alone in the joint.'"

Something in the expression of the hackman's face induced Gus to ask:

" 'What's your idea of the racket? Did you fool him, or didn't you?'"

" 'I'm afraid he was onto me.'"

" 'Why did he leave, then?'"

" 'Well, he must have known that he couldn't worm anything out of me, and concluded—that's the way I put it up—to make believe he'd got the straight business from me, and then go away so he could have a fine chance to pipe off my movements afterward.'"

" 'What did you do when he went away?' interrogated Mitchell.

" 'I dived into one place and then into another so as to get him off the track if he was shadowing me, and finally, when I thought I had mixed him up a bit, I chased over here to see you and put you on your guard.'"

Mitchell thanked him, and then told the story of the tramp.

Jack Sprat trembled like a leaf, hardened villain though he was, when Mitchell mentioned the exhibition of the rabbit's paw.

" 'It's Nick Carter himself,' was his hoarse comment.

" 'So I think.'"

" 'Then we must skip out at once, for he has probably gone to the police office to get help.'"

" 'I don't think so,' said Gus, with some confidence, "for he is not the man to make an arrest until he has secured an abundance of evidence.'"

" 'That's so,' returned Jack, "and the evidence, so far, is all in his eye.'"

" 'He may suspect me,' conceded Mitchell, with reviving spirits, "but he has no proof that I ever met the girl. And he'll never get that proof, unless——"

He stopped, as a sudden thought occurred to him—a thought which made his cheeks turn an ashen gray.

" 'Unless what?' said Jack Sprat, anxiously.

"Unless he finds it at Tarrytown."

The countryman under the box heard these words, and smiled in satisfaction.

"I must get over there and queer the business," continued Mitchell, nervously, "no matter at what risk to myself."

"Where is this proof?" asked Gus.

"At the hotel."

"I'll go with you," said Jack.

"No, you must remain here."

"Why?"

Mitchell whispered a few rapid words into the hackman's ear.

Two citizens were coming up, or he would have spoken in his ordinary voice, as before.

Five minutes later Mitchell left the saloon and walked rapidly out of town in the direction of Tarrytown.

He dared not go to a livery stable to procure a horse, but he knew a man living on the outskirts, who peddled vegetables, from whom he hoped to obtain an animal, or better still, the man's services to drive him to the river.

The vegetable dealer, who had been a bunco steerer in his young days, but who had taken the advice of the then Inspector Byrnes to leave New York and turn over a new leaf, was at home when Mitchell knocked at the door.

The young man had discarded his smoked glasses for good.

The vegetable man knew him at once as an apt pupil of his when he and Hungry Joe were the bunco kings of the great metropolis.

"Hello, Boke," he cried, with heartiness as he grasped the young man's hand. "What brings you out this way?"

"Cheese it, Pat," said the other, nervously. "My name's Mitchell, now—Jim Mitchell."

"Well, Jim Boke or Jim Mitchell, it's all the same to me, as long as you don't change your mug. Come right in and make yourself at home. The old woman

has croaked since I last saw you and I'm now baching it here alone."

"Can't come in, Pat. I'm in a hurry. I want to ask a favor."

"Spit it out"—looking at the young man keenly—"and I'll help you if I can."

"Can you drive me over to Tarrytown this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then hitch up and let's start at once."

"What's the racket?"

"I'll tell you when you get on the road."

Pat Moran's cold blue eyes looked searchingly into Boke's.

He shook his head slowly but emphatically.

"You must open your budget now, Jim. I don't want to put my head in a hornet's nest, if I can help it."

"You'll run no risk whatever. All you've got to do is to take me to Tarrytown. Once there, you can turn about and drive home."

"So you won't open up?"

"If you insist, I will."

"I insist."

"Well, then, there's a page in the register of a hotel in Tarrytown that I want to fix."

"Is that all?"

"And a clerk that I want to whisper a few words to."

"What about? A heifer?"

"Yes."

"Nothing serious in the game?"

"No."

"Because I'm out of crooked business now, and respectability is my strong suit."

"I see."

"But I'm always willing to help a friend as long as it doesn't compromise me."

"I'll explain fully on the way over, and you'll see that you're taking no chances of being put in a hole."

"All right; I'll take your word and hitch up."

But before the twain had left the place, Nick Carter had passed the house.

He was the countryman who had hidden under the box by the side of the saloon in White Plains, and he still wore that disguise, which differed materially from that of Old Thunderbolt.

He had seen Jim Boke go boldly up to Pat Moran's door, and he at once divined his mission.

And the great detective also knew all about the occupant of the house.

Ever since he had ceased to be a bunco man, Moran had been under police surveillance, though he was unaware of the fact.

Night was coming on, and Nick hurried over the road until he reached the farm where, a few hours before, he had left the horse and buggy.

Inquiry of a boy standing at the gate elicited the information that the farmer had taken the rig back to the livery stable about an hour before.

"Dad had business in town," said the lad, "and so he concluded to take the livery outfit in while he was about it."

"Has he any horses in the stable now?" asked Nick.

"No."

The rattle of wheels up the road made him turn round.

Jim Bloke and Pat Moran were coming along in a buggy at a rattling pace.

Nick Carter bit his lips in angry vexation.

If Boke reached Tarrytown in advance of him he would likely be able to destroy the evidence the great detective was anxious to gain.

Something must be done to prevent the villain, whom Nick now believed to be the murderer of Grace Fulton, from reaching Tarrytown that evening. In a few moments the team with his quarry would pass the gate by which he was standing.

An inspiration seized him.

Stepping behind a bushy cedar on the side of the gate, he took out his note-book, tore out a leaf, and wrote a few lines upon it.

He had the leaf in his hand when the ex-bunco steerer drove up.

"Stop a minute," cried Nick, in the nasal tone of a countryman from New England, "I want pesky bad ter speak ter ye."

Moran reined up his horse and looked at the disguised detective curiously.

"What do you want?" he asked, brusquely.

"Ef yer air goin' ter Tarrytown, I guess you kin dew a heap fer me, mister."

"Come, come," said Moran, impatiently, "tell me what it is you require."

"A ride tew the river, jest that, mister, an' nothin' more, I dew guess."

"Cant' take you."

"I'll give yew a dollar."

"Ten dollars wouldn't induce me."

Moran was about to drive on, when Nick cried out in piteous entreaty:

"Yew wouldn't beat a feller citizen aout of ten dollyers, would yew?"

"What are you giving us?" sternly demanded Jim Boke.

"The trew business. A man hired me ter go ter Tarrytown, an' told me tew come tew this haouse and get a team."

"Well?"

"There ain't no team here."

"That's your lookout. Drive on, Pat."

"Hold on there, mister; I think yew'll let me ride when yew see this ere bit of handwrite."

Nick held up the leaf torn from his note-book.

"I was told not tew show it tew a livin' soul 'cept the man that lives in that there haouse, but bein' ez I've got tew get tew Tarrytown, I'll show it tew yew, mister."

The disguised detective handed the pa

per to Jim Boke, who was in the seat nearest him.

The villain, in great astonishment, read these lines:

"Dear Mr. Billings:—Let the bearer have the livery rig. Have changed my mind about sending it back to town. The bearer will drive it to Tarrytown, where I will meet him to-morrow. NICK."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S EXCITING ADVENTURE.

Boke debated with himself a moment and then passed the note to the ex-bunco steerer.

The latter read it with a wrinkled brow.

"You haven't been square with me," he said, in a low voice, so as not to be heard by the pretended countryman.

"Yes, I have, as far as I went," returned Boke.

"This note was written by Nick Carter."

"I am sure of it."

"I am dead sure of it for I know his handwriting."

"Well, mister men, what dew yew say? Dew I ride, or must I depend on Shank's mare tew see me threw?"

"Get in behind," said Moran, quickly.

The buggy was an open, piano-box affair, and Nick scrambled in behind and sat down in the bed of the vehicle and let his legs dangle over the edge of the box.

As the horse started up, Moran began to pump the disguised man-hunter with questions.

"Do you know the man who gave you this note?"

"He's a detective."

"Do you know his name?"

"Don't I, though? Ain't he the feller that saved me from bein' skyugled by the green-goods men daown in Connecticut last summer? Know him? I jest guess I

dew, mister, and I know him fer a bad man tew fule with."

"His name—what is it?"

"Nick Carter."

"That settles it," whispered Boke.

"What does he want you to go to Tarrytown for?" continued Moran.

"Tew see the head perliceman there and tell him tew arrest a party with smoked glasses the minute the party enters the taown."

Boke whistled softly.

"Did he tell you?" asked the latter, "why he wanted the man arrested?"

"No."

"But he wanted you to hurry over to Tarrytown as quick as you could, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why couldn't he go over himself?"

"He said he had tew keep an eye on tew a man daown in a saloon in White Plains."

"What sort of a man?"

"A hackman from New York."

"What had the hackman done?"

"Give it up, mister."

"Wasn't you curious to know?"

"Mebbe I was, but I had sense ernuff tew ask no questions uv Nick Carter. What he wanted tew tell me, he told, and what he wanted tew keep tew himself, he jest naterally kept."

Boke breathed more freely.

If Nick Carter stayed at White Plains expceting that this Yankee friend of his would transact his Tarrytown business for him, or put it in a shape to be transacted by somebody else, then the chances were good that the great detective would get beautifully left.

There was silence for a moment.

Then Boke said:

"Got any other business in Tarrytown?"

"No."

"Where is your home?"

"I live jest aout o' White Plains, t'other side, now."

"Married?"

"Yes, siree."

"Rather be at home than running over to Tarrytown, hadn't you?"

"Guess I would, mister."

"Then jump out and go home. We'll deliver your message to the chief of police."

"Will yew naow, trewly?"

Nick put on a pleased expression.

"Yes."

"Yew'll gin it intew the hands uv the head perliceman, an' no one else?"

"No one else shall receive it."

"Nick Carter 'd give me a roastin' ef this air matter went and failed tew connect, mister," said the false countryman, earnestly.

"We're friends of Nick, and wouldn't have him disappointed for the world," asserted Jim Boke, with equal earnestness.

"Dew tell!"

"Yes. We used to know Nick in New York. But, come, we're wasting time. Jump off and leave the rest to us."

About five miles of the distance had already been traversed.

Nick resolved on a bold move.

Jim Boke must not be permitted to proceed a step farther on his journey.

Although the great detective had not yet obtained any direct evidence to prove that the man who had worn the smoked glasses was the murderer, he now resolved to place Boke under arrest.

Under different circumstances Nick would have waited longer before making such a move, but the case had now assumed such a critical phase that desperate measures must be adopted.

Yes, he would arrest Boke, have him detained at the nearest farm-house until the Tarrytown evidence had been secured, and then return and convey his prisoner to Mount Vernon.

"Stop the nag," said Nick, "and let me get on easy; I've got roomatiz tarna-

tion bad, mister, and dassent jump off while we air a-travelin'."

Pat Moran brought the horse to a standstill.

Nick got off slowly, and with a succession of painful grunts.

"Wa-al, mister," he said, with a peculiar smile, "I'm everlastin'ly obleeged tew yew fer takin' the job off'n my hands, I swum to pucker ef I ain't."

"That's all right," responded Boke, pleasantly.

"Wa-al, good-by tew yew, and I hope ye'll see the head perliceman soon's yew get tew Tarrytown."

Nick held out his hand.

Boke grasped it unsuspectingly.

The next instant he found himself lying on his back in the dust.

Nick, with a quick, powerful jerk, had brought him from his seat to the ground.

The moment this was done, out came two pistols. One was pointed at the prostrate Boke, the other at the dumfounded Pat Moran.

"You don't want any of this," said Nick, sternly, and in his natural tones, addressing the ex-bunco steerer, "for there's Sing Sing in front of it."

"The deuce you say," gasped Moran.

"You've been walking straight lately, and you're getting along all right, Pat. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"Then don't mix yourself up in an affair like this."

"You're Nick Carter, yourself," said Moran, with a keen look at the disguised detective.

"I am."

"What's Boke been doing?"

"Something that will give the electricians a job."

"Great Scott!"

"Drive home, Pat, and ask no more questions."

"Don't go," entreated Boke, hoarsely.

"I will be all right if we can knock this fellow out."

"'If' is a troublesome word, Jim," rejoined Nick, coolly.

"Good-by, Boke," said Moran, as he turned his vehicle and pointed for home.

"I don't think I want any of this pie."

"Are you going to desert me like this?"

"Yes; I'm looking out for number one, now."

As he drove off Boke turned to Nick.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Put you in jail as soon as I can."

"For what?"

"Murder."

"Whose?"

"Grace Fulton's."

"You've got no proof."

"Jack Sprat, the hackman, will turn State's evidence when he hears that you're in a hole."

"You'll have to catch Jack first."

"Chick has got him by this time."

Boke was silent for a moment.

Then he said:

"Why should I murder the girl? Every crime has a motive, and where would be the motive in my case?"

The villain was now sitting up in the road, but Nick still had him covered.

"I'll find the motive in good time. Perhaps"—with a keen glance at Boke—

"I shall find it at Tarrytown."

The shot was an experimental one, but it hit the mark.

Boke's face turned ghastly pale.

"You shall never go there," he fiercely cried, and made a quick move to get at his pistol.

Nick promptly gave him a kick which made him assume his former prostrate position.

After removing the villain's weapons, the great detective handcuffed him, and then led him toward a farm-house a short distance away.

The house was an old, unpainted affair, and stood near the road.

When Nick got close to it he saw that nearly all the windows were broken, that the front door was gone, and that there were no signs of habitation.

Pushing back a half-open gate which had but one hinge, he conducted Boke up to the door-way and entered.

The house was one of two stories.

All the rooms on the first floor were bare, and the dust was thick on the floor and window sills.

But one room was provided with a lock and bolt.

This was the bath-room, opening out of the kitchen.

Nick took his prisoner into the bath-room, and sat down on the edge of the bathtub for a moment to consider the situation and decide upon his next course of action.

It was more than a mile to the next house, and the afternoon was well nigh spent.

Nick desired to get to Tarrytown without any unnecessary delay, for Boke had a friend there, the person to whom he had sent the dispatch—one William Brink—and there was the possibility that he might be in the secret of Boke's doings at Tarrytown, and that he might take it upon himself, knowing or suspecting Boke's connection with the murder, to destroy the incriminating evidence at the hotel, which Nick was anxious to get possession of.

"Shall I leave the villain here, bound hand and foot, and locked up in this bath-room," mused the great detective, "or shall I go on to the next town and put him in charge of some person who will watch him closely till I come back?"

While he was deliberating the matter, his quick ear caught the sound of soft footsteps in one of the rooms in the second story.

The house was not untenanted, then.

Curious to know who the person overhead was, Nick secured Boke's ankles with cords, and then locking the door on him, made his way with as little noise as possible to the stairway.

He reached it just as the mysterious individual, who proved to be a large man with a scrubby brown beard, a shrewd face, and a pair of keen, blue eyes, began to descend the stairs.

When his eyes fell on Nick, his brow darkened and he growled out these words:

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"The owner of the place, sure enough," thought the detective.

"I want to see you," he replied, pleasantly.

"You do, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, spit it out. What do you want?"

The man was now at the bottom of the stairs.

As he spoke he stepped into the room, Nick standing aside to permit him to do so.

"I want the assistance of an honest man," said the detective, gravely.

"That's me," said the other, quickly.

"Are you the owner of this house?"

"If I ain't, who is?" looking at Nick, suspiciously.

"I don't know."

"Then put me down as the owner."

"All right."

"And now what is your business with me?"

Nick paused a moment before answering.

He was beginning to fear that the man was not to be trusted.

"I'm no tramp," he said, for the purpose of gaining time.

"Who said you was?"

The man raised his voice.

They were in the dining-room and the door opening into the kitchen was open.

Jim Boke, in the bathroom beyond, heard the voice and put all of his lung power into the one yell:

"Kill him, Bill. It's Nick Carter!"

The man quickly drew his pistol, when——

Bang! and a bullet from Nick's revolver struck him in the wrist.

Dropping the pistol with a scream of pain, he flung himself upon the detective.

A struggle for life and death followed.

CHAPTER VII.

BILL BRINK MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

While the struggle between Nick Carter and the man Bill was going on, Jim Boke gave vent to a series of yells:

"Lay him out, Bill! He'll do me up if he gets away with you. Give him a taste of your Muldoon business. Hug the life out of him. Butt his brains out," and so forth.

Nick had engaged in many hand-to-hand contests, but he had never met a man who possessed this Bill's combative strength and skill.

He was a superb wrestler and boxer, and his muscles were like steel.

It was a battle between giants that took place on the dining-room floor of the old house.

Not a word was said as they rolled over and over, each one straining every nerve to obtain the mastery.

At last Nick got the hold he wanted.

Exerting all his strength—and it was Herculean—he rolled his adversary over on his back and planted his knees upon his chest.

At that moment some one entered the front door.

Jim Boke's voice was heard at the same time:

"Use your teeth, Bill! Bite his neck off!"

Nick heard the footsteps and turned his

head just as the dining-room door was flung open.

The newcomer was Jack Sprat, the hackman.

Leaping forward, he jumped on Nick before the latter could rise, and struck the brave detective over the head with a revolver.

When the Little Giant regained his senses, he found himself in the bathroom, bound hand and foot, and the man called Bill sitting in a chair and grimly contemplating him.

It was night, and a lantern was burning in the room.

"What time is it?" asked Nick, after he had his thinking apparatus in good working order.

"Ten o'clock."

The great detective groaned.

He had been unconscious three hours.

Time enough for Jim Boke to have got to Tarrytown and destroyed the evidence which the place had held.

"Who are you?" he asked, presently.

"My name is Brink."

"William Brink?"

"Yes. Ever heard of me?"

"I know you have been at Tarrytown lately."

"I live there."

"Then you don't own this place?"

"Yes, I do."

"How came you to be here to-day?"

"Left something behind when I moved out a month ago. Went back to get it."

"You had no idea of meeting Boke here, then?"

"No."

Nick looked at Brink for some time without speaking.

At last he said:

"You're not an old resident of New York, are you?"

"I was born in Tarrytown. I know what you're driving at," Brink went on; "you think I'm a crook, and yet you

can't place me. Well, you're dead wrong. I was never in jail in my life."

"Why do you assist Boke, then, and in so doing commit an offense against the law?"

"Best reason in the world: he's my son-in-law."

Nick stared hard at the speaker.

"Is your daughter living?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"With me, at Tarrytown."

"Do you know of what your son-in-law is accused?"

"Yes."

Brink spoke coolly and unconcernedly.

"I don't think you do," said Nick, positively.

"It's murder, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I know all about it. Jim told me."

"Then you must believe him to be innocent?"

Brink said nothing in reply to this question.

Nick waited a moment, and then continued:

"You wouldn't assist a cold-blooded murderer to escape, would you?"

"If he were my son-in-law, yes."

"You act as if you upheld Jim Boke in his foul crime."

"I do."

"What?"

"I do uphold him."

"Then you are as bad as he is," said Nick, in righteous indignation.

"Not quite."

"You know he killed pretty Grace Fulton, and you say that she ought to have been killed. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

Nick gazed up into the composed features of the man, and doubted if he had heard aright.

What manner of a man was this who

could give utterance to such monstrous sentiments?

"Are you willing to give your reasons for saying this?" interrogated Nick.

"Certainly. I told Boke before he left that I intended to tell you, and he said he had no objection, considering that it would be the last story of any kind you would be likely to hear in this world."

Coldly, remorselessly were the words uttered.

Nick, brave man though he was, felt his heart sink.

"You mean to kill me, then, do you?" he said, as quietly as he could.

"Yes."

"Is it possible that you, who have never committed a crime before to-day, are about to stain your hands with the foulest of crimes?"

"Look here," said Brink, roughly. "I don't want you to put me up for what I am not. I said I had never been in jail. I didn't say I had never committed a crime. See?"

"Ah!"

"It is only the fool who allows himself to get nabbed."

"The wise crooks are few."

"I am one of them."

"Beware lest you make the one mistake of your life."

"I have no fear of that. No one but Boke, Jack Sprat, and myself know that you entered this unoccupied house. You will disappear, and no one will ever discover what has become of you."

"Have you determined on the manner of my death?" asked Nick, calmly.

"Certainly. You won't suffer much."

He nodded at the bathtub.

"I am to be drowned—is that it?"

"That's it. I'll turn the water on."

Nick shut his eyes, and for some moments not a word was said by either of them.

There was little hope that anything would intervene to save the helpless de-

tective, but he resolved to put off the dread moment as long as possible by making his executioner talk.

"You said," Nick began, "that you would give me the reasons for asserting that Grace Fulton ought to have been killed."

"So I did."

"I am waiting to hear them."

"She claimed to be Jim's wife."

"Wasn't she?"

"Well, there was a doubt about it. Maybe if she'd gone into court, as she threatened, she would have made out a case."

"Well?"

"When Kate, my daughter, found out that this Fulton girl claimed to be Jim's wife, she swore she'd kill Jim, murder the baby, and drown herself, if it proved true."

"Jim told her she was a little fool; that she was his wife, and that Grace Fulton had no legal claim on him."

"Kate affected to believe him, but she wasn't quite satisfied with what he said. After he had gone she told me that she intended to run down to New York and interview the girl, and find out what proofs of her marriage she had if any; in short, to worm the whole business out of her."

"Now, Kate has got money of her own—I didn't give it to her; she got it as a legacy from a rich aunt—and I knew if she went back on Jim I'd suffer as well as he, for it's only on Jim's account that she'll stand the sight of me. I ain't her real father, you must know, only step-father. See?"

Nick nodded his head.

Bill Brink stroked his stubby chin and went on with his story:

"When she made her threat, off I goes to Jim, and posts him. 'Any woman,' says I to him, 'who stands in the way of your enjoying a fortune, as you're now doing, ought to die.'"

"Then you—you fiend—you prompted

the murder?" exclaimed Nick, in hot indignation.

"I expect I did," said the villain, coolly.

"Then you ought to hang as well as he."

"Which I never will."

"Don't be too sure of that."

Brink gave utterance to a low, jeering chuckle.

"You can't scare me, Nicky, my boy, not a little bit. My tracks are covered up, and Jim's will be when he gets through this night's work at Tarrytown."

The great detective had nothing to say to this.

"Want to hear the rest of the story?" asked Brink, after a short pause.

"Yes."

"Jim went down to New York, saw the girl, and tried to induce her to give up a certain paper she had, and which she claimed was a certificate of marriage. Jim told me there had been a mock marriage and nothing more, and that the paper given to her did not amount to anything. I don't know to this day whether Jim lied to me or not."

"But you know he killed the girl, though."

"Wait; you're getting too previous. Jim asked her for the paper, and she said she had left it at Mount Vernon at a Mrs. Strong's. 'Get it for me to-night,' Jim said, 'and I'll make you a monthly allowance and never cross your path again.'"

"She promised to do this, for she had ceased to love him, and started that day for Mount Vernon."

"Part of the way she walked, and between East Chester and Mount Vernon Jim met her in a hack. He told her that it must be that night or never, and he said he'd meet her at the long sheds back of the hotel at Invermere."

"'I'm coming up from the Sound in a boat,' he explained, 'and after I've got the paper I'll take you to town with me

and let you off at Harlem. We'll have a beautiful all night ride on the water.'

"The prospect of the sail did not seem to please her, but she said she'd be at the place appointed, if she failed to get work at Mount Vernon. 'If I do, and my employer insists on my going to work, you'll have to wait a bit,' she said."

"Well, luck was against her. She didn't get any work, and when night came she was at the sheds."

"Jim had bought some cakes, knowing she would be hungry as well as dog tired."

"Into one of 'em he had put an arsenic wafer, but she had not swallowed more than half of it, when she spit the rest out."

"'What are you trying to do, Jim Boke?' she says."

"'Nothing,' says he, and he looked so surprised that she came to the conclusion that the baker must have allowed some nasty foreign substance to slip into the cake unawares. Bakers do such things sometimes, you know."

"Before this she had given up the paper."

"Well, they talked and talked, Jack Sprat waiting in a boat a little way off, but it was not until along about midnight, I think, that the poison began to work on her. She hadn't taken enough to lay her out, only to put her into a little pain."

"The minute the pain struck her good, she accused Jim of poisoning her, and when he denied it, she laid hands on him, and tried to get the paper back which she had given him."

"Jim wasn't going to allow anything of that kind to happen, you know, and so he struggled with her, and they had quite a scrap then in the dirt of the shed."

"How it would have terminated I don't know, for she seemed possessed with the fury of a tigress, Jim said, if Jack Sprat had not come up."

Brink paused, and looked at Nick with an evil smile.

"Nice little story I am telling you, isn't it?"

Nick made no reply.

"Want to hear the end, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Can't you guess it?"

"I might."

"Try."

"Jack Sprat knocked the poor girl on the head, and the pair of villains went to the boat, got the anchor stones, and the rope, which had been provided for the murderous occasion, and, attaching them to the victim's waist, bore her to the swimming pool and dropped her in."

"Straight as a string. What a mighty good guesser you are. But there's one thing you can't tell me."

"What is it?"

"Whether the girl was conscious or unconscious when she struck the water."

"She was conscious."

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Brink, in amazement.

"I heard her dying cry."

"Where were you?"

"In the hotel. Didn't you hear what my testimony at the inquest was?"

"No."

A slight noise was heard outside the house.

Brink did not appear to notice it.

Nick resolved to try an experiment.

Raising his voice, he said:

"Can you hear well?"

"Why do you ask?" with a start.

"Because you have acted once or twice as though you did not catch what I said."

"Ah!"

"Then you are a little deaf?"

"Yes, a little."

A short pause. Then Nick said:

"You haven't finished your story, have you?"

"Yes, and I have been explicit, for I wanted you to know the whole business before you died. I am a curious sort of a coon, and I rather enjoy the telling of

the story to you under the circumstances."

A satanic chuckle followed this utterance.

The noise outside was heard again.

Nick tried not to show any nervousness, as he endeavored to make Brink talk a while longer.

"How about the cloak and hat found in the hollow by the fallen tree?"

"Jim put them there."

"Did he write the letter, signed Grace Fulton, which was found in the pocket of the cloak?"

"No."

"He didn't? Who did, then?"

"Your humble servant," said Brink, coolly.

"You? Why, how could you imitate her handwriting?"

"Jim gave me a letter, which she wrote to him in answer to one of his a week before she croaked."

"Ah!"

"I'm pretty good at the business—in fact, between you and me, and seeing we are going to part so soon, I will say that I have been a successful forger for years."

"Perhaps you've got the poor girl's letter on your person now," suggested Nick, as he glanced furtively at the open door near which he lay.

"I have."

"And Jim's, too, the one which brought her answer?"

"Yes, I have them both."

"Then if I had those letters there would be no need of making any investigations at Tarrytown."

"None in the world."

"The letters tell the whole story, then?"

"Yes."

"Does Jim's speak of the appointment at Invermere?"

"Yes. He wanted her to go there a long time before he came down to see her, but she wouldn't consent."

"I'd like to read those letters," said Nick, slowly.

"I'll bet you would."

"Why not let me read them? I am going to die soon, so what harm can there be in showing me the best proof yet of Jim Boke's guilt?"

"No harm as I know of."

"Then produce them."

"Danged if I don't. I wouldn't be consistent if I withheld them."

"And consistency is a jewel, so I've heard," said Nick, with a queer twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, indeed; I started out to tell you everything, and it wouldn't be according to Hoyle to keep back a part."

Brink took out his pocketbook, opened it, and found two letters.

Holding them up, he said with an air of savage pride:

"Only think! Here are the documents that the prosecuting attorney would give half his yearly salary to see."

"I'll take them to him."

The voice came from the door-way.

The next instant the letters were snatched from Brink's hand.

Before the burly villain could make an offensive move, he was looking down the muzzle of a six-shooter held in the steady hand of Nick Carter's faithful assistant, Chick.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER CLOSES IN.

"Hands up!" commanded Young Hercules, "and don't be all night about it, either."

Bill Brink did not obey the command.

Better death, he thought, than an arrest after the revelations he had made.

"Never!" he shouted, and forgetting the wound in his wrist, he sprang forward with both hands extended to seize the indomitable young detective by the throat.

Another bullet from Chick's pistol shattered one of his ribs, but did not stay his progress.

Raising the weapon high in air, Chick sought to bring it down on the desperate ruffian's head at the moment when one of Brink's hands touched his shoulder.

Jim Boke's burly father-in-law dodged and the pistol cut the empty air.

The momentum of the blow sent Chick staggering against Brink's broad breast.

The villain's arms instantly closed about Young Hercules' waist like a vise.

Nick Carter, lying on the floor of the bathroom a few feet away, looked up with emotions that were painful in the extreme, when he saw Brink's brawny arms close about the faithful Chick, and saw the expression of murderous delight that looked forth from his eyes.

The next instant hope entered Nick's heart, for Brink uttered a cry of pain.

It was succeeded by another and another.

Chick had all his wits about him when the muscular villain seized him.

One hand was free, and that hand at once reached back and grasped Brink's wounded wrist, and gave it such a squeeze as made the villain yell with pain.

Chick followed up his advantage until Brink dropped his hand.

Then it was that the great physical force of Nick Carter's assistant came into superb play.

Brink's one useful hand still held him with fierce tenacity by the wrist.

Jerking himself loose, the young detective planted a blow that would have felled an ox between the big villain's eyes.

Brink staggered back against the wall, close by the bathroom door, but did not fall.

"Curse you!" he hissed between his clenched teeth, "I'll cut your heart out for this."

Quick as a flash he drew an ugly-looking knife from his bosom.

But it never reached the body of Chick, for in that instant the young detective had had time to pick up his revolver, which had been dropped at the time Brink grasped him about the waist, and had it cocked in his hand when the knife flashed into sight.

Bang!

A yell from Brink and the knife dropped to the floor.

Both wrists were now useless.

For one moment the wounded and terribly suffering wretch glared at Chick like a wild beast. Then his eye suddenly lighted on the lantern, which stood in front of the bathtub and on a line with the doorway.

Giving it a kick, he smashed the glass and both rooms were instantly in darkness.

At the same moment Brink fell on his knees.

What his design was he hardly knew himself, but he must have had some vague hope that the darkness might favor his wicked desires.

His heels touched Nick Carter's side, but he gave no heed to this circumstance.

It took all the villain's power of self-control to keep from crying out, so great was the pain he was undergoing, but gritting his teeth fiercely he kept silence.

For a few moments nothing was heard but the deep breathing of the three men.

Chick presently heard a low sigh of satisfaction from the direction of the enemy, and rightly guessed that he had recovered the knife.

Soon Brink began to crawl softly toward the kitchen where Chick had been left.

"Look out!" called Nick.

Brink had just passed the doorway, when a bright light was suddenly flashed into his face.

Chick had brought out his bull's-eye.

"Hadn't counted on that, had you?" remarked the young detective, quietly.

Brink blinked his eyes, and swore a frightful oath.

"I'll take that knife, if you please," Chick quietly continued.

"No, you won't," exclaimed Brink, resolutely.

"Yes, I will."

The young detective stepped forward to relieve the wounded ruffian of his only weapon, when Brink made a quick and surprising demonstration.

Pressing the point of the sharp blade against his left breast, he threw all his weight against it, and fell forward with his face to the floor.

One groan and he was dead.

The point of the blade had pierced his wicked heart.

Nick Carter was released from his bonds, when Chick became assured that his ferocious enemy had ceased to exist.

What the great detective said to his brave assistant may be imagined.

"Now," said Nick, when the body of Brink had been searched, and further evidence had been discovered in a small envelope containing arsenic wafers, "we must hurry in to Tarrytown."

"You won't find Jack Sprat there."

"Why won't we?"

"Because he's tied to a tree outside this house."

Nick looked his surprise and gratification at this piece of news.

Chick then told the great detective that he had followed Sprat to White Plains, and had reached Gus's saloon soon after the hackman had departed for Tarrytown.

Gus was Jack's brother, and had had no share in the murder other than being a confidant of Jack and Jim Boke after the awful crime had been committed.

Terrified by Chick's words he had made a full confession and was now in jail at White Plains.

Hurrying over to Tarrytown on horse-

back, the young detective found no traces of either Jack Sprat or Boke, and was about to give up the quest and return to White Plains, when he thought he would drop into a saloon near the river, which in days gone by had borne a shady reputation.

There he found Jack Sprat.

The hackman had shortly before this parted with Jim Boke for the night, but Chick did not know it.

Placing Sprat under arrest, he was about to take him to the Tarrytown lock-up, when the hackman weakened and told Chick where Nick Carter was.

Taking the rascal along as a guide, the young detective procured a horse and buggy—leaving his saddle horse at Tarrytown—and drove back toward White Plains.

On reaching the unoccupied house, he had secured the horse at the gate, and then tied the hackman to a tree.

Entering the building softly, he had been an interested listener to the latter part of the conversation between Nick and Brink, in which Boke's confederate had related the story of the murder of pretty Grace Fulton.

Before morning the two detectives with the captured hackman were in Tarrytown.

Arriving at the police office Nick was furnished with a startling piece of news.

The officer in charge informed him that the murderers of Grace Fulton had been arrested the afternoon before at New Rochelle by two private detectives.

"What are their names?" asked Chick.

"Joseph Johnson and Walter Brown, mokes, and James Morgan, white, the latter the son of a real-estate agent in Mount Vernon."

"What's the evidence against them?" queried the great detective, quietly.

"It's all circumstantial, but I guess they're the men. They were seen lurking about Invermere in the afternoon that the girl disappeared, and Morgan, when half

drunk the day after let out to some friends of his in a saloon it would be a big feather in his cap if he told all he knew about the case."

"And is that all the case against these three men?"

"All, as far as I know."

Nick looked at Chick and smiled.

Jack Sprat was locked up, and the two detectives found themselves on the deserted street in front of the police office at an hour before daybreak.

"Those suspects will be free men before night," said Chick, "whether we capture Jim Boke or not."

"Sure."

"It's a good thing for us that they've been arrested, though."

"Yes, I think so, for Jim Boke has probably heard of it, and will feel doubly safe now. We're sure, I think, to find him in Tarrytown."

"Yes. That's my opinion."

"I'll bet he is at his wife's house now."

"You mean the house of Brink's daughter. Grace Fulton was his wife."

"I stand corrected, Nick."

"What do you say to going there now?"

"I say yes. In fact, it was what I was going to suggest."

Without further words the two detectives set out for the house.

Jack Sprat had told him where it was located.

It was a block from the river, and formed one of a row of tenements.

A light in a front window induced the two man-hunters to believe that some one was up.

They crept noiselessly up the steps, and listened at the door.

The sound of voices reached their ears.

They could hear what was said, for the parties were engaged in a domestic quarrel.

A woman was speaking in a shrill, angry voice as they came up.

"This is a pretty time of night, James Boke," they heard her say, "to be coming home to your wife, isn't it? And especially after what you've done, and all the fine promises you've made."

"I've been trying to clear my skirts of the killing of that girl," he surlily replied, "and I've succeeded, though it took me nearly all night to do it."

"What have you done?" she asked, in a doubtful tone.

"I have assisted in the arrest of the three men who did kill her. They are now in jail at Mount Vernon."

Bill Brink's daughter had not heard of the arrest of the negroes and the white man, and her manner became more gracious as she listened to the made-up story which he told her.

Their further conversation, which related principally to the murdered girl, convinced Nick and Chick that the woman inside now believed that Grace Fulton had been Jim Boke's mistress and not his wife.

"Well, I think I'll turn in and get a snooze," Boke said, after a long pause. "I'm dog tired, and that's a fact."

"I shall sit up and wait for the morning papers," said Brink's daughter.

"All right. You'll find the full particulars of the arrest in them."

Pretty soon Boke arose, and went into the hall, and thence into a room opening out of it.

Nick and Chick waited fifteen minutes, and then the former tried the door.

To his great satisfaction it was unlocked.

Nick went toward the door of the room he supposed his quarry to be in, while Chick proceeded to pay his respects to the woman in the other room.

Brink's daughter, a comely woman of twenty-five, sat beside a table, reading a book, as Chick pushed the door open, and appeared before her.

She repressed the scream that was on

her lips when she saw the young detective's uplifted finger and the look of warning in his eyes.

"I am your friend," he whispered, "and am come to do you a favor."

"What is it?" she asked, faintly, and staring at him blankly.

Coming closer to her, he said, with magnetic earnestness:

"Jim Boke has lied to you. He killed Grace Fulton, and he did it for the purpose of securing a firmer hold on you. He wants your fortune, and——"

He said no more, for the sound of a struggle in the room which now held Jim Boke and Nick Carter made him pause.

"What's that?" Brink's daughter asked, with a face as pale as death, and with her hand pressed tightly against her heart.

"All right," came the clear voice of the great detective, as if in answer to her question, "I've got him safe."

"Got who safe?"

She looked wildly to Chick, and rose unsteadily to her feet.

"Jim Boke," replied Chick, gravely, "and it's Nick Carter who has him."

"Nick Carter! Then it's true what you said?" she despairingly uttered.

"Yes. He's a murderer, and he has deceived you from beginning to end."

"Then I'm not his wife?"

"No."

"I don't believe you," she cried, after a moment, as her cheek alternately flushed and paled. "I am his wife."

"Wait and I'll convince you that I've told the truth," returned Chick, gently, "painful as the duty will be."

He called to Nick, and the great detective came in bringing Jim Boke, handcuffed, and his head bowed on his breast.

"Have you searched him?" asked Young Hercules.

"Yes."

"What did you find?"

"Several things."

"Name them for the benefit of this lady."

"I found a leaf torn from the register of the Marsh House, with his name upon it, and also that of Grace Fulton underneath it."

Brink's daughter uttered a faint cry, and sank down in her chair.

"What else?" asked Chick.

"I found a certificate of marriage."

"Whose?"

"James Boke's and Grace Fulton's."

"No more, no more," moaned the deceived woman, piteously, "I know enough now. Take him out of my sight. Ugh!" looking at him with a shiver of disgust, "how I despise you."

Boke glared at her defiantly, but said nothing.

When daylight came he was a prisoner in the same jail that held Jack Sprat.

Before night they were quartered in the lock-up at White Plains.

The two negroes and James Morgan were discharged from custody without an examination when Nick and Chick's great capture became known to the prosecuting attorney of Westchester County.

Boke and Sprat have not yet been tried, but their conviction is certain.

The evidence contained in the letters Chick snatched from Bill Brink's hand is most damaging.

Not only did Boke refer in the one he wrote to Grace Fulton to the appointment at the open sheds at Invermere, but he made mention of an article he had once given her, which he feared she had lost.

That article was the rabbit's paw.

(THE END.)

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain "Officer Dugan's Beat; or, The New Member of the Force."



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